

STATEMENT ON ANTHRAX VACCINE IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM (AVIP)

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PREPARED FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Committee on Government Reform

Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs, and Intn'l Relations

September 29, 1999

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I want to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. The issue of the Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program has been a tumultuous one for many and I hope my comments here today may help the committee, and indeed the whole Congress, in its quest to understand the impact on the people who take an oath, wear a uniform, and face an impending order to be immunized under the Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program (AVIP).

I do not intend in any way shape or form to represent the official position of the Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, the New York Air National Guard, the 109th Airlift Wing or any persons holding positions of authority over me. Neither do I intend this testimony to lead any members of the military to hold a position that supports or does not support this program.

I intend to relate to you my personal perceptions culled from various people in my unit and how they may react when it comes time for mandatory vaccination under the AVIP and the DOD policy. I will touch on morale, retention, and recruitment.

In October of 1985 I stepped into the world of the U.S. military as an enlisted man. I served just under 4 years as an aircraft mechanic on the C-130, achieved rank in advance of my peers, attended night school and had greater goals in mind. I was able to get an early release from my active duty commitment to attend college and return as an officer with the intent to become a pilot. I thank God, my wonderful and supportive wife, my family, friends, co-workers and peers for all their support over the years in my quest for the wings I proudly wear.

I am currently an Aircraft Commander assigned with the 109th Airlift Wing based at Stratton Air National Guard Base in Scotia, New York. I have the privilege and honor to fly the LC-130H version of the C-130. We are the only unit in the world to fly this aircraft and are the single point provider for the DOD and the National Science Foundation to both the Arctic and Antarctic. Our unit flies the largest ski-equipped aircraft in the world and we land on the polar ice caps of both Greenland and Antarctica. An even greater honor is to fly in the vast untouched areas of Antarctica and Greenland with some of the best people the USAF has ever known. We are people who love very much what we do, what we have accomplished together, and the specialty of our work. The Arctic and Antarctic are the two most adverse places in the world. With temperatures that routinely hang around -40C and unpredictable severe weather conditions, it can be terribly unforgiving if something goes wrong. This is why our teamwork effort is so great. In years past we have accomplished far in excess of our goals of moving people and cargo safely and efficiently from various parts of the United States to the farthest reaches of Antarctica and Greenland. However, now there are some concerns looming.

I. What it takes to fly at the 109th

From a pilot's perspective at the 109th, let me share with you what it takes to make one fully Ski qualified Aircraft Commander (AC). The individual will begin the process by Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT). This program is estimated to cost approximately 1.5 million dollars and takes just over a year to complete. Upon graduation the new pilot has about 200 hours of flying experience and will then go to Water and Combat Survival Schools. This adds another several thousand dollars and takes two weeks. The pilot will then be sent off to Little Rock AFB for initial Co-Pilot Qualification costing tens of thousands of dollars and it will take about 4.5 months. At the end of this training, the pilot will return to our Guard Unit and, barring no unusual delays, will get checked out in our C-130H and the initial systems knowledge of the LC-130 ski equipped aircraft. This is additional cost in time and money for the person in question. The pilot will then go north to Greenland and south to Antarctica under the instruction of a cadre of instructors and will take almost a year to be a fully qualified as a co-pilot on the Ice. After roughly 2-3 years, depending on the experiences documented, the proficiency displayed and the training received, the pilot will now transition to Aircraft Commander Candidate. He or she will fly with several instructors to be evaluated and input will be gathered from other crew members which is considered in the decision to send that person back to Little Rock AFB for more training and Aircraft Commander Upgrade. By this time the pilot will have roughly 800-1200 hours of flying time in an aircraft that costs close to \$6,000.00 an hour to operate. Aircraft Commander school takes about 2 months and adds tens of thousands more to the cost. Upon return, the pilot again goes through a quick conversion course from the E-model to the H-model version. The pilot is certified by board

recommendation and flies as a wheels only aircraft commander for about 100 hours. He or she is then sent into the program to become an Aircraft Commander on the Ice. At this point, with his or her experience as a co-pilot, full qualification can be completed in about one month, pending necessary weather conditions and a check-ride complete. This pilot is now ready to command the aircraft, and crew, of an LC-130 in a place where their skills require them to fly precisely, and smoothly. Landing on ice with that much aircraft takes a crew effort that eventually rests in the hands of the Aircraft Commander, sometimes under near white out conditions. It has cost the Taxpayer approximately 4-5 million dollars and the individual almost 5 years to become a generic Aircraft Commander. It will take a further 3-4 years to become an instructor and yet another 3-5 years to become an evaluator, both of which greatly increase the cost of investment in the individual and worth to our unit. This is JUST the pilot. This does not include the navigator (an officer position), the engineer (an enlisted position) or the loadmasters (an enlisted position). All of the people in these positions go through years of training and experience at great investment of time, taxpayer money and personal sacrifice as well as that of the sacrifice of their families. This is a good representation of both timeline and cost. Safety being our hallmark, none of us would like to see a drastic change in our level of experience, among our crewmembers and instructor cadre.

II. Some of the concerns

I have heard many members of Congress refer to those in uniform as "America's best and brightest." Many of those best and brightest have done their homework and have concerns about this vaccination weighing heavy on their minds. This due to the inconsistencies they find in the DOD information and the expert testimony already presented to this committee. They feel that there has not been a reasonable effort made to address their concerns. To many of them it is very disturbing to see such a great difference in what the DOD tells them and what they are uncovering on their own. I hear a recurring theme from the enlisted people that they feel that they are between a rock and a hard place. They must keep their jobs, as they have obligations to support their families, but they are greatly concerned about becoming a statistic of the Anthrax vaccine. It is their contention that should they resist, they could face losing their job, punishment or both. Yet if they take the shot series they greatly risk affecting their health and STILL losing their job with medical separation and a small pay benefit -- then living with their ailments for the rest of their lives. They wish to avoid these scenarios at all costs. I believe that many of them will leave, resulting in a serious morale and recruitment problem.

As for the pilots, once more let me speak from that perspective. We have many pilots who are Guardsmen. They are what many refer to as the "Week-end Warrior." They have families and jobs that exist apart from the Guard Unit and have the ability to look at the situation and weigh

whether or not they want to chance an adverse reaction to this vaccine. Many of them are airline pilots and are rightfully concerned about the risk to their airline jobs due to potentially harmful side effects. They have simply done the cost-benefit-analysis of risking their health for a part-time position that they do not solely rely upon. Many of them will exercise their option to leave if faced with an ultimatum under current circumstances. After all, if they can not hold an FAA class one medical, they are grounded. Some of these people are finding information suggesting that their HMO's will treat an adverse reaction to this vaccine as a "pre-existing condition" and thus not cover these ailments.

III. The Impact on our unit and mission

As I stated before, our unit flies in a part of the world that does not forgive mistakes. It takes great team effort with people who have a combined experience that spans many years and individuals. We do not arrive in Antarctica or Greenland with inexperienced people and simply send them on their way. The importance of the instructors and evaluators cannot be emphasized enough. These people can only be replaced over a long period of time. This is assuming that those who have gone before us, teach and pass down to us everything they do so very well.

Training requirements keep all military aircrew busy. When we are not in the Arctic or Antarctic, we are home at Stratton ANGB flying as any other unit does to keep up our flying skills. Each crew position requires the person filling it to be proficient on a large number of flying and ground training events. This carries on into the Arctic and Antarctic. As a result, training is constant. Air Force rules require that much of the training be done with an Instructor. Simply flying in a landing pattern with one engine simulated out (producing no thrust but running in case we need it) can not be done, even by Aircraft Commanders, without an instructor at the controls with them. Not one check ride to demonstrate yearly proficiency in all areas can be accomplished without both an instructor AND an evaluator.

Now that you have a basic idea of the importance of experienced individuals, you will better understand the potential impact to our single Guard unit should these highly trained, expensive and invaluable individuals exercise the option to leave us over the AVIP.

1. Training will seriously lag behind, further complicating unit effectiveness as no new people will have basic qualification thus straining the other crews to have to do more or operate at a higher Operations Tempo.
 - o There are 8 fully qualified Aircraft Commanders who each must spend 10 weeks in Antarctica.
 - o The loss of just 2 of them will result in the other 6 now spending 13.5 weeks
 - o The loss of a total of 4 of them will result in the remaining 4 spending 20 weeks in Antarctica

- All of the above predicated on NONE of the Technician or Traditional Guardsmen leaving yet they are more likely than the AGR pilots to be the ones leaving
2. Those individuals who now have to fly all the time to make up for the losses will also run into regulatory time outs where they will be mandatorily grounded due to having flown so many hours in a months time or a 90 day period.
 3. Chronic fatigue will set in and play a part in reducing safety, risk management numbers climb. Morale declines
 4. End of season numbers fall short of goals further hurting morale

Who are the types of people most likely to leave?

1. Traditional Guardsmen who have positions as Airline Pilots
 - Concern of becoming a health statistic as serious questions remain about the Vaccine
 - Concern that their own health problems may result in their grounding as a civilian pilot
 - Concern that their career could be lost as a result
 - Concern that their own health care companies under their Airlines will not cover their ailments of found to be linked to the anthrax vaccination series.
1. Technicians who have marketable skills that see a future as a professional in the private sector after a Guard Career.
 - Possible discrimination against being hired as a pilot by an airline that is adverse to hiring someone who may be a health risk
 - Concern of becoming a health statistic as serious questions remain about the Vaccine
 - Concern that their current career could be jeopardized by way of being grounded and medically retired
 - Concern that their current health care providers may not cover reactions to this vaccine
1. AGR (Active Guard Reserve) personnel
 - Concern of becoming a health statistic as serious questions remain about the Vaccine
 - Concern that their current career could be jeopardized by way of being grounded and medically retired
 - Possible discrimination against being hired as a pilot by an airline that is adverse to hiring someone who may be a health risk
 - Concern that the DOD may refuse to acknowledge their medical condition being a result of the vaccination program and thus not be well taken care of medically

The Enlisted people in my unit will suffer greater morale loss than the officers for several reasons.

1. They do not have as much economic freedom unless in business for themselves or are professionals outside of the Guard as civilians
2. Their skills, though important and relied upon heavily, are not as marketable for comparable pay and benefits unless their rank has them in managerial positions
3. They will see a great many people they have come to respect and work with, leave them behind resulting in degradation of morale
4. They will have to work much harder to try and offset the losses in people
5. They, too, will have longer deployments to Antarctica resulting in depressed morale, time away from family
6. Chronic fatigue will eventually come from longer deployments, safety concerns will rise

Again, these folks do not arrive at these conclusions lightly. Many of them are heartbroken over the thought of leaving behind all that they have worked for, and the years of service that they have given over this vaccine -- yet it is just what many will do. They are keenly aware of the loss of income. They are burdened by the potential loss of retirement benefits. They do not hold their commanders in contempt, as they know that they will be following the directive of the DOD. They do not fear other vaccines or make any overtures to resist them. On the contrary, many of them have expressed that they will gladly roll up their sleeves and take any vaccine when given reasonable assurances as to its safety.

I have heard from some that support this program that there is a deliberate campaign of misinformation to undermine the morale of the troops and cause them to question the command. They may have an argument, however, since so many come to the same conclusions and since so much credible information is in conflict with the DOD's policy and position and assertions would it not be to the benefit of all to have a single agency outside of both parties review this and help end the debate as well as the concerns? This is what they are thinking in my opinion. Several of the folks I have spoken with have asked the same question. Since many in the Congress have had access to greater amounts of information on this issue, knowing what you know, would you be willing to risk your career by taking this vaccine?

I thank you again for your time and effort spent on this issue and for your time here today and will be glad to take your questions now.